

AT Advisory Council

Minutes for the August 15, 2006 meeting

Members Present:

Kevin Ammons, consumer; **Bill Ager**, consumer; **Noah Hershkowitz**, consumer; **John Nousaine**, ILC representative; and **Meg Steimle**, parent representative.

Members Not Present:

Betsy Gruba, consumer; **Brent Odell**, DPI representative; **Bob White**, DVR representative, **Jackie Wells**, consumer.

Staff and Others Present:

Holly Laux O'Higgins, WisTech Director; **Ralph Pelkey**, WisTech AT Specialist; **Sharon Vivian**, CART accommodations provider; **John Reiser**, Director, Office for Independence and Employment.

Location:

Midstate Independent Living
Consultants, Stevens Point

Review of minutes from April meeting

Motion: A motion to approve the minutes was made by Noah Hershkowitz, seconded by Kevin Ammons.

Discussion: The discussion noted a spelling error on the second page.

Vote: The vote to approve was unanimous.

Review of the bylaws

Motion: A motion to approve the bylaws was made by Meg Steimle, seconded by Bill Ager.

Discussion: No discussion.

Vote: The vote to approve was unanimous.

DHFS Update

Wisconsin's Funding for FFY06

WisTech is currently spending the award for federal fiscal year 2005 and will begin spending the award for federal fiscal year 2006 after October 1. The award for federal fiscal year 2006 was increased by approximately \$19,044.

Evaluating SPAT Attachment Eight Activities

Discussion centered on the current method for evaluating the State Leadership activities described in Attachment Eight of the State Plan for Assistive Technology. Holly and Ralph will create a list of current evaluation methods for the activities for review by the Council for the November 2006 meeting. The Council will review current evaluation methods and provide suggestions for additional evaluation measures, if necessary.

Funding Allocation Discussion

The Council discussed how to allocate the \$19,044 in additional funding. Discussion touched on a regional demonstration house (Chairs and Cares in Wausau), increasing contracts to the Independent Living Centers, the Wheelchair Recycling Program and creating a small subcontract process for local, innovative assistive technology projects.

The underlying criteria for the distribution funds discussion centered around creating the biggest impact on the availability of AT services statewide for the limited funding available.

Motion: The following motion was made by Kevin Ammons: for the upcoming grant period, increase contracts to Independent Living Centers by \$1,000 each, increase the contract to Wheelchair Recycling by \$2,000, and reserve \$1,000 for small subgrants. The motion was seconded by Noah Hershkowitz.

Discussion: Kevin asked that the Council recognize the motivation behind his motion. The larger increase to the Wheelchair Recycling Program is in response to the statewide services provided by WRP. An increase of less than \$1,000 would not impact services at the ILCs. Incorporating small subcontracts into the activities of WisTech encourages local, innovative activities and projects around assistive technology.

Vote: John Nousaine abstained from the vote due to his status as a subcontractor impacted by the proposed motion. The remaining members voted unanimously to approve the motion.

2007 Appropriation Update

The AT Advisory Council sent a letter in May 2006 urging members of the Wisconsin delegation to contact the chair and/or ranking member of the House and Senate committees reviewing the Tech Act. The letter urged funding the Tech Act at \$35 million. Currently, the Tech Act is being funded at \$30.45 million in the House Appropriations Committee and \$30.49 in the Senate Appropriations Committee. This contrasts with the President's Budget which funded the Tech Act at \$22.4 million.

As additional information becomes available, the Council will be notified.

Equipment Loan and Demonstration at Midstate ILC

Stephanie Baublitz provided the members of the Council with a description of device loan and demonstration services at Midstate ILC, along with a tour of the AT device inventory and a demonstration of equipment.

Medicaid Infrastructure Grant: Training and Technical Assistance Project

Ralph updated the Council on the status of the Training and Technical Assistance website that WisTech is working with Stout to create. The goal is to create a central resource to connect consumers with the wide variety of AT services currently available.

There is a web designer and a resource specialist working on the website who are gathering information. Organization of the site will be multi-level so consumers can reach the same information by a series of different routes. The site will be structured to provide print outs of information to individuals without computer access.

Technical assistance will also be available through Stout to provide AT-specific information and referral.

Council Member Recruitment

The recruitment efforts for 2006 resulted in 25 applications. Before the Council meeting, Holly O'Higgins and Ralph Pelkey redacted (removed all of the personal information) the applications and provided scoring sheets and applications to members of the Nominations Committee. The Nominations Committee members scored each application and Holly O'Higgins averaged the scores to create a list of the top six candidates.

Application materials from the top six candidates were distributed to the Council members. John Nounsaine recused himself from the discussion because he recognized a number of the candidates. Candidates were selected based on a variety of criteria including average score and geographic location. Criteria were based on the composition of the Council as described in the Council bylaws.

Three new consumer members were elected to the Board: Kyle Kleist from Menomonie, Tami Jo Weber from River Falls, and Chris Coppess from LaCrosse.

WisLoan Overview

Ralph Pelkey presented a review of the WisLoan Program. WisLoan is a low-interest loan program, open to Wisconsin residents of all ages who have a disability, for the purchase of assistive technology (AT), including home modifications. WisLoan is Wisconsin's Alternative Finance Program (AFP) under the US Department of Education AT Act of 1998 as amended. Loan Counselors at the Independent Living Centers assist the consumer to identify the appropriate AT. All loans through the program are reviewed by the Loan Board, and are either approved or denied based upon the likelihood of whether the consumer can pay back the loan based upon their credit history and debt to income ratio.

Ralph explained how the grant money and local match funds are managed, the process of applying for a loan, and the operation of the WisLoan Board in reviewing and approving loans. The Council was given a handout that profiles the numbers of applications, loans, data on WisLoan consumers, and AT that has been purchased as of July 31, 2006. The US Dept of Education has recently approved an additional grant of \$750,000 for WisLoan. With the \$250,000 match from Independence First, this increases the Program's funds by \$1 Million.